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ABSTRACT

This position paper indicates that, human survival depends upon a major change in humanistic values or the way we view our relationship to the world. Education must go through reform from within that includes the adoption of a K-12, transdisciplinary, problem-solving curriculum. And must, also, offer students environmentally sound alternatives to the uncertain future they face, in an educational environment that is humanized. With the focus of environmental education on human behavior and the interaction of it with the total environment, the learning setting will change to include the community-at-large. The plan developed by the Northwest Environmental Education Center (NEEC), with state funding, provides for the implementation of environmental education programs on a number of levels: community or district level, the county level, and the regional or inter-county level. Teacher training within each of 38 districts will be given the highest priority for the purpose of establishing a hierarchy of environmental specialists to function in each district. Intensive training of a cadre of teachers from each district will permit inservice training. The pilot project at Sedro Woolley School District is cited here at length and in SO 002 249. (Author/SBE)

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HUMAN SURVIVAL AND EDUCATIONAL REFORM: A Position Paper by the Northwest Environmental Education Center for Distribution to the 1971 Session of the Washington State Legislature.

A B S T R A C T

Human survival depends upon a major change in the way we view our relationship to the world. Pathogenic premises within which we now operate have been identified by experts as the major cause of our environmental crisis. These premises must be challenged by our educational institutions through reform from within that includes the adoption of a transdisciplinary, problem-solving curriculum. We must offer students environmentally sound alternatives to the uncertain future they face, in an educational environment that is humanized. A model for a regional academic plan as well as for a program is proposed.

SP 002 022

What Do The Experts Tell Us?

In the course of its research for the U.S. Office of Education on alternative futures and educational policy, the Educational Policy Research Center of the Stanford Research Institute (SRI) concluded that the world macroproblem (problems of the ecosystem; the expanding have-have not gap domestically and between nations; and technological threats, including threats to privacy and individual rights) is symptomatic of a pathogenic condition most obvious in highly industrialized nations. In short, the problems we must solve, which are largely a consequence of unchecked technological and population growth, are a function of values and premises that we continue to operate within. One such pathogenic premise[1] which we as a nation have supported almost without challenge until of late is the premise that economics should be based on an ever-increasing GNP. Denial of the pathogenic nature

[1] Other pathogenic premises are cited by the SRI and are attached to this paper to provide a broader base for these tentative and preliminary conclusions.

of this premise in the struggle to convert from a war-time to a peace-time economy is to be expected as unemployment and human desperation rise simultaneously.

Identification of those values that are pathogenic is complex, for some have the potential to resolve problems as they create others. Medical advances within the past few decades which have increased the human life span here and in underdeveloped parts of the world have unintentionally provoked in impoverished nations an increase in the number of deaths from famine. However humane the original motives were (the prolonging of life), no provision had been made to help these populations check their rates of birth, a provision that would have allowed them some exercise of control over the quality of their lives. (These same humanistic value systems were at variance during recent debates over abortion reform.) An ever-increasing GNP has the potential to stimulate jobs for an ever-increasing population. At the same time, however, irreplaceable resources will be tapped at an ever-increasing rate which will, when they are depleted, have dramatic and deleterious effects on the way we live. The belief that technological breakthroughs will occur to solve this depletion is itself a pathogenic premise. Both the SRI and the U.S. Office of Education agree that technology, far from being a panacea, is itself, through excessive misuse, the major cause of most of the serious environmental problems we face today.

The Stanford Research Institute makes clear that the establishment of a new set of operative values must be consistent with the basic assumptions, values, and goals implicit in the nation's founding. These fundamental premises, that the universe has a moral order discoverable by man, that man is endowed with reason, and that in some "transcendental" sense all men are

created free and equal, have not, in practice, been honored in our culture. Decisions to develop and use technology to support an ever-expanding GNP have been made in a context that has ignored the rights of individuals to a healthy environment. This deviation from our moral responsibilities is what our disenfranchised youth have been trying to point out to us in a variety of ways.

Two other expert opinions, those of the U.S. Office of Education and of the Office of Science and Technology (Executive Office of the President), support the SRI position that <u>educational policy must change to allow us as a nation to deal competently with an uncertain future</u>. The Office of Education spells out the new role of American education as one they call Environmental/Ecological Education. <u>The overriding issue is one of survival that can only be dealt with by major educational reform</u>. The U.S.O.E. agrees that the problem is rooted in values: "All Americans should be given the opportunity through programs of environmental education to develop ecological values that are equal to or greater than the political, social, economic, and religious values that have been the basis for human decision-making processes." It reaffirms the SRI position that such changes in attitude and behavior must come as expressions of individual choice.

<u>What Is The Position of the Northwest Environmental Education Center?</u>

Selection of this particular expert testimony is deliberate and biased. It lends credence, nonetheless, to the position that has been taken by the Northwest Environmental Education Center (NEEC) during the past two years that environmental education must address itself to the difficult and controversial task of changing the way we relate to our world. If it does not present us with alternatives to the pathogenic premises within which we

operate now or offer environmentally sound options for major decision-making, then the opportunity to control our destiny will, in time, diminish. Survival is the issue, dictating, if you will, the educational imperatives before us. Members of the Stanford Research Institute, whose job it is to investigate for the U.S. Office of Education the possible alternative futures open to Americans, have informed the staff of NEEC that only three metropolitan areas within the continental United States have any time remaining to make significant changes within their environments to support a quality existence: the Houston area, the St. Paul-Minneapolis area, and the Northwest region of Washington state, which extends northward from Olympia through Tacoma, Seattle, Everett, Mt. Vernon, and Bellingham. What kind of challenge does this hold for our educational institutions within the next decade? How much time is left to initiate new programs? What kinds of programs can and should be developed? Is there a plan? Is there a model?

The Northwest Environmental Education Center has received a total of $170,000 in private, state, and federal funds since it began major coordination and program planning two years ago. Recognition of the Center's potential as a model by the State Office of Public Instruction is a matter of public record. What are its plans and what kind of program will it develop?

The plan developed by NEEC, with state funding, provides for the implementation of environmental education programs on a number of levels: the community or district level, the county level, and the regional or inter-county level. Teacher training within each of the 38 districts will be given highest priority over the next few years, and to this end the Center has proposed the establishment of a hierarchy of environmental education specialists who would be competent to function in their districts on one of three levels:

on the district level, on the school level as coordinators, and, of greatest importance, in the classroom. Intensive training of a cadre of teachers from each district, through the cooperative efforts of NEEC and Huxley College of Environmental Studies (Western Washington State College), will permit in-service training to go on as well within each district, with the original cadre of teachers instructing their colleagues. Guidelines for pre-service training by Huxley are already taking shape, based on a preliminary training program in operation within the Sedro Woolley School District.

Although the program will unquestionably vary from district to district to meet special needs, it will, with consistency, cut across traditional disciplinary lines and focus on problem-solving. The pilot project going on at present in the Sedro Woolley School District is cited here at length to illustrate some of the major educational reforms NEEC is proposing. Through the training of 25 teachers by the Northwest Environmental Education Center and Huxley, a K-12 curriculum is evolving that centers on the Skagit Valley and the problems that face that geographic area today. It suffers from the highest unemployment in the state, faces closure of Northern State Hospital, and stands at the gateway to the North Cascades National Park. What implications do these major changes have for the future? What kind of planning can alleviate the employment problem and yet preserve the region's high value as an agricultural and recreational area? What traditional disciplines can be brought into play to help solve the problems of the Skagit Valley? How can teachers' and students' views on the solutions to these problems be reflected in the political process? Such an approach to learning brings us close to the real problems that surround us, allows us to share in their solutions, and brings relevance to traditional academic subjects.

Implicit in such an approach is first-hand investigation of these problems. Sedro Woolley teachers are presently conducting an inventory of the Sedro Woolley community, particularly of those areas close to the school building proper. The setting in which learning takes place will change to include the community-at-large. It is appropriate here to spell out the distinction between this proposed program and what is referred to as "outdoor education" or "conservation education." Environmental education must focus on human behavior and the interaction of it with the total environment. The latter programs have a real place within environmental education, but do not address themselves to the vital issues of human survival, nor have they, in the past, challenged with any great impact the pathogenic premises within which our culture operates.

At the same time that teachers are defining their communities as primary resources for learning, they will be examining the environment of the classroom to assess its effect on learning and communication. Leading authorities from a number of disciplines, most notably from behavioral psychology, are pointing out that the ways in which we behave and the ways in which we learn and communicate are the product of a number of factors not yet identified as significant. A study recently described in a Seattle newspaper claimed that learning increases when it goes on in a yellow room. Although such a claim seems superficially preposterous, what if it is true? And if it is true, what other unrecognized variables around us influence our behavior and the way in which we relate to our world? What kind of perception "exercises" could be designed that could inhibit our easy accommodation and adaptation to a slowly, barely perceptibly, deteriorating environment?

<u>These recommendations for educational reform must be given support by the 1971 Washington State Legislature if optimal programs are to develop</u>.

Identification of a model program, such as that proposed by NEEC, is a necessary first step before a state-wide program can become operational. The economic recession in Washington state provides a unique opportunity, under stress, to look at how we are spending our educational dollars. The Northwest Environmental Education Center recommends that the educational priorities within this state be re-examined and that educational dollars be reassigned to support those programs that will answer our most critical need, that of survival. Survival through education is an idealistic notion, but a practical one as well. Can we afford not to take the risk?

REFERENCES

1. Harman, Willis W. "Alternative Futures and Educational Policy," Memorandum Report EPRC 6747-6. Prepared for Bureau of Research, U.S. Office of Education, by the Educational Policy Research Center, Stanford Research Institute, Menlo Park, Calif., February 1970.

2. "A New Role for American Education." Office of Education, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Washington, D.C., May 19, 1970.

3. "The Universities and Environmental Quality: Commitment to Problem-Focused Education," a Report by the Office of Science and Technology, Executive Office of the President, September 1969, to The President's Environmental Quality Council.

A listing of Pathogenic Premises identified by the Educational Policy Research Center, Stanford Research Institute, in preparation of a study on "Alternative Futures and Educational Policy" for the Bureau of Research, U.S. Office of Education, February 1970.

1. The premise that the pride of families, the power of nations, and the survival of the human species all are to be furthered (as in the past) by population increase.

2. The "technological imperative," that any technology that <u>can</u> be developed, and any knowledge that <u>can</u> be applied, <u>should</u> be.

3. The premise that the summed knowledge of experts constitutes wisdom.

4. The reductionist view of man, a premise associated with the development of contemporary science and which lends sanction to dehumanizing ways of thinking about and treating men.

5. The premise that men are essentially separate, so that little intrinsic responsibility is felt for the effects of presentations on remote individuals or future generations.

6. The premise that man is separate from nature, and hence that nature is to be exploited and "controlled" rather than cooperated with.

7. The "economic man" image, leading to an economics based on ever-increasing GNP, consumption, and expenditure of irreplaceable resources.

8. The premise that the future of the planet can safely be left to autonomous nation-states, operating essentially independently.

9. The disbelief that "what ought to be" is a meaningful concept and is achievable.